

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

MH-53M, TAIL NUMBER 68-10930

UDAIRI RANGE, KUWAIT

13 FEBRUARY 2003

On 13 February 2003, at 11:50 p.m. Arab Standard Time, an MH-53M helicopter, tail number 68-10930, crashed near Ali Al Salem Airbase, Kuwait. The MH-53M was assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron, 16th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, FL. The mishap crew consisted of the pilot, copilot, flight engineer, right scanner, left scanner, and tail scanner. Also on board was an 11-man special operations team and desert patrol vehicle. There were no fatalities and only minor injuries as a result of this mishap. The aircraft sustained substantial damage valued at over 15 million dollars in repair and replacement costs. The crash site was located on the Udairi Range, and there was no other damage to property or injury to other personnel.

The planned mission was a night tactical 4-ship, supporting special operations teams training for impending combat operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The mishap aircraft departed as chalk 4 and proceeded on a 12-minute tactical navigation route to an initial point, where the flight took spacing for simultaneous landings at proximate helicopter landing zones. Previously unfamiliar with the landing site other than by map study, the mishap pilot, flying from the left seat, executed a dust-out approach and landing within established parameters. Upon touchdown, the nose landing gear (NLG) collapsed, intruding upon flight control tubes, causing uncommanded movement of the flight controls. This caused the rotor tip path to dip excessively, resulting in main rotor blade contact with the ground and failure of the tail structure.

The primary cause of the mishap was a combination of inadequate mission preparation and aircraft design deficiency. Due to insufficient pre-mission study of the planned landing site and accepted landing accuracy tolerance, the pilot landed on terrain that did not accommodate his touchdown profile. At the same time, the deficient NLG design and unprotected flight control components turned an otherwise acceptable landing into a catastrophic mishap.

Under 10 U.S.C. 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding arising from an aircraft accident, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.